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Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis
Directorate of Intelligence

5 November 1986

NOTE FOR: DDCI

Bob-

    I had fun grappling with your Middle
Eastern terrorism question. I wish I felt
more comfortable with my effort, which is
attached. In any case, perhaps this will
help you in some way to draft your speech.
I didn't have time to do any research--the
open source literature alone is voluminous--
so I have generalized and tried to avoid
too many dates or other specifics. I hope
this is of some use to you.

Deputy Director

Attachment

5 November 1986

Middle Eastern Terrorism

Understandably, Middle Eastern terrorism (in the region or committed elsewhere by Middle Easterners) had taken center stage for most Americans by the 1980s. I would urge that we not think of it as a phenomenon of the eighties. Terrorism has been a fact of life in the Middle East for many decades. I believe, however, that some significant differences between the Middle Eastern terrorism of the early 1970s and that of the mid 1980s can be identified.

The terrorism that took place in the region in the 1950s and 1960s was, for most of us, something distant that didn't touch our lives:

--Jordan's King Abdallah was assassinated in 1951 by a
    Palestinian fanatic because of his contacts with Israel.

--Syrian Baath Party thugs and their counterparts in the
    rival Iraqi Baath Party killed each other in strange places
    for reasons that were never very clear to us.

--Rival Palestinian groups that always were identified by
    initials that meant nothing to us seemed to do more
    violence to each other than they did to their proclaimed
    enemy, Israel.

Middle Eastern terrorism began to come home to Americans in 1970 when Palestinians belonging to the Christian-led PFLP hijacked three US airliners and forced them down in the Jordanian desert. The passengers were not harmed, but the pictures of the

fiery explosions that destroyed the planes at Dawson's Landing
created quite a stir.

--The Palestinians had moved their battle against Israel from
the level of the _fedayeen_ guerrilla to the international
arena. Ordinary Americans had become more than observers
of the Middle Eastern struggle.

--Parenthetically, Jordan's King Hussein was mortified by the
Palestinian hijackings and the growing strength and
brazenness of Arafat's PLO in Jordan. Soon thereafter,
King Hussein's army drove the PLO fighters out of Jordan,
where the Palestinians were beginning to threaten the
regime. The irony of this is that the King's success
forced the PLO to take a refuge in Lebanon, where they soon
created their state within a state and set in motion the
now 11-year-old Lebanese civil war. To that civil war can
be traced many of the tragic events of the 1980s that have
befallen Americans at terrorist hands.

--In 1973, two US diplomats in Sudan were killed by
Palestinian terrorists.

--In 1976, during the Lebanese civil war, the US Ambassador
in Beirut was assassinated by unknown gunmen.

The point of this is that by the early 1970s, Americans were
becoming victims in the Middle East conflict. The terrorists,
mostly Palestinians, were using violence as an alternative to a
political solution to the Arab-Israeli problem. State support of
terrorism was a fact of life, even though we didn't talk much
about it; the Palestinians were dependent on the Arab states for

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money, guns, training sancturary, and all the rest. Palestinian
violence toward outsiders slowed after the mid 1970s, however,
when Arafat decided to focus his fighters' attention on Israel and the
occupied territories and away from international terrorism.

All of us were horrified by the Palestinian terrorism of the
1970s, but I suggest that we sort of understand what was behind
it and what motivated the terrorists: Arab Muslims didn't like
Jews; the Palestinians were also Marxists, Christians, Muslims,
doctors, lawyers, and they had attended the American University
of Beirut--their basic values were essentially "of the West;"
Arab nationalism was competing with Jewish nationalism for
control of the Holy Land--and ethnic nationalism was not alien to
our fathers and mothers who came from Ireland, Armenia, Serbia,
or wherever. All of these things were vaguely familiar to
Americans and while we might not like the violence that was going
on in the Middle East; we could empathize a bit.

A sea change in Middle Eastern terrorism began in the late
1970s, I believe, with the overthrow of the Shah, the coming to
power of Khomeini and the Shia in Tehran, and the long captivity
of the American embassy hostages.

   --From the dismal failure of US diplomatic and military
      efforts to free the hostages, the Iranian terrorists came
      away with certain conclusions:

         * The "Great Satan" could be defeated. It would fume,
            but it could not bring effective force to bear in
            terrorist situations. This was an eyeopener to
            other terrorists, not just Shias.

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The Iranians and their new Shia allies in Lebanon were a
breed apart from the Palestinian terrorists we came to know in
the 1970s. They had a deep streak of fanaticism, hated the West,
and had a martyr complex that Americans found hard to understand.

--They drove an explosive-laden truck into the US Embassy in
Beirut in April 1983 and not long after repeated that
devastating tactic against the US Marines barracks in south
Beirut.

--These dreadful attacks largely went unanswered. Our
reactions were verbally ferocious, but of no practical
consequence. We mounted an unsuccessful air strike against
terrorist in the Bekaa, but the evacuation of the US
Marines soon took place.

--The numerous kidnappings of American hostages in Beirut--
presumably by the Shia Hizballah movement with its ties to
Iran--also left the US with egg on its face. We hestitated
to bomb known terrorist camps in eastern Lebanon for fear
we would kill our fellow Americans or that the Shia would
kill the hostages in retaliation.

The point I would make is that the source of the terrorist
threat has shifted in the past 15 years or so; the targets are
different, the objectives of much of the violence has been
altered, and state support of client terrorism has become more
open:

--Palestinian terrorists to radical Shia terrorists.

--Israelis as targets to random, often uninvolved Westerners
as targets.

--To secure redress of Palestinian grievances to the elimination of Western influence and values in the Middle East.

--Increasing recognition that terrorists act in conjunction with or at the direction of states such as Libya, Syria, and Iran.

    * Syria may believe more than ever that its political interests have not been taken into consideration by the West/US. Through terrorism, Damascus demonstrates that it needs to be included in any "legitimate" Arab-Israeli settlement.

    * In the case of Qadhafi, he may be flattered by the willingness of more radical groups to turn to Libya for support. Reinforces his concept of pan-Arab revolutionary <u>movement</u>.

(I recognize that the above ideas are <u>gross</u> statements, and that contradicting evidence is easy to find.)

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